



*Alaska is one of the best areas globally to see the spectacular Northern Hawk Owl*

# Alaska:

## The last frontier

### May - June 2019

## Introduction and planning

With stunning scenery, an enviable array of waders including one of the world's rarest, a good chance of one of the world's best looking owls, a gull fest, a 'full house' of eiders and some memorable mammals, Alaska has to be up there on most birders' *must visit* lists.

The team had two objectives, firstly to see the key birds Alaska had to offer, and secondly, to sweep up as many ABA (American Birding Area) ticks (following previous trips to most of the rest of North America).

Timing is key as earlier in the season birds are singing and are easier to see, you catch the late spring migration most notably for Emperor Goose and McKay's Bunting, and you miss the ferocious mozzie season which starts from about mid-June. Because of this, and most birders concentrated over a six-week period, the secret with Alaska is to plan early, as accommodation and even car hire can be booked out or become very expensive in some areas.

Alaska is not a cheap State; internal flights, accommodation and car hire are all expensive, and certainly not for Brits with £1 equalling \$1.3 at the time of our trip. In total the trip cost about £4,750 each for everything (including airport parking at Glasgow and food). Compare and contrast to a typical [Birdquest](#) equivalent trip which would cost over £9,500 plus international flights. It pays to shop around and we found some good value accommodation, and staying four to a room in places produced obvious savings.

Most comprehensive trips focus on Anchorage, Seward, Barrow, Nome, the Denali and Paxson loop, and Saint Paul Island in the Pribilofs. After examining our options against key birds we could do no better than follow this tried and tested route. Overall the trip was a great success, missing just three very tough target birds:

- Emperor Goose which were few in number at Nome this year, and lots of luck with a drop-in or flypast is required even in a good year. The bird is straightforward enough to find on Kodiak Island where they winter, and another option is to keep your ear to the ground for vagrants in mainland US where there have been some long-staying birds
- Sharp-tailed Grouse that no one sees anyway at the time of our trip, as from about early to mid-May they stop lekking (not critical as a number of good sites elsewhere in ABA)
- Spruce Grouse that similarly becomes close to invisible during the breeding season (and is also not critical).

So successful was the trip, seeing 36 waders speaks for itself, that Graeme Joynt had thought seeing 50 ABA ticks would be pushing it. Such were the way birds fell into place, especially on Saint Paul Island, 57 were new. We saw a total of 199 species of birds and at the end of the trip, after totting up the number, slightly regretted not looking harder for Chestnut-backed Chickadee in Seward!

We did not target Grey-headed Chickadee (aka Siberian Tit) as getting within range is hard enough, never mind our understanding from Alaskan birders that the birds have become harder to find of late.

A few tips on the birds from our trip. Don't assume all Herring Gulls are Vega Gulls as we think some trip reports may have done - American Herring Gull does occur, as it did for us. There is much confusion around Canada Geese and whilst we clearly cannot offer a definitive view, we think our conclusions on the birds we saw, based on current knowledge, are reasonable and sound. Whilst Ebird is a truly fantastic resource, there is plenty that may be exaggerated, just look at the distribution of Kittlitz's Murrelet off Lovell Point, Seward, as an example, a species known for precise habitat requirements at the base of glacial outflows. Oh, and start planning early.

## Getting there

To reduce the risk of long queues and transfer complications, we wanted to avoid transferring in the US. We initially struggled to get reasonable value flights as options are limited, but a chance phone call with [Trailfinders](#) revealed linked-fare flights for £650 return to Anchorage from Glasgow, via Reykjavik, with the additional benefits of shorter 'over the top' flights. We needed to link a minimum of two nights' accommodation or two days' car hire and we opted for the latter, which was more expensive than we could book ourselves, but not excessively so.

## Getting around

Within Alaska we used [Alaska Airlines](#) to go to Nome and Barrow. There are no direct flights between Nome and Barrow. For our Barrow return flights we paid \$374 (£287) and the Nome return flights \$334 (£257) each. The Saint Paul Island leg, including flights, accommodation and food, were organised by the very efficient [St Paul Island Tour](#), which also provides guides and transport around the island – a superb outfit. We were forced to reorganise our itinerary and opt for the three-day tour when Pen Air pulled out. The package, and internal flights with [Ravn Air](#), were \$2,245 per person (£1,727). This isn't cheap but Saint Paul Island was one of the highlights of the entire trip and the experience cannot be recommended highly enough.

We used hire cars to get around except for Saint Paul Island and [Denali National Park](#) where, in the latter case, beyond a certain point, the park's buses must be used (which can be booked in advance using the link immediately above).

For the Kenai Fjord boat trip we used [Alaska Saltwater Lodging](#), another superb company and highly recommended (\$270 or £206.70 each).

## Weather

Judging by other reports, it seems we were fortunate in having good weather throughout and losing hardly any birding time at all to rain. Temperatures ranged from 14 to 22 degrees Celsius

from say mid-morning, except for Barrow which hovered just above freezing all day. Take layered clothing for all weathers, and gloves and head gear for Barrow.

## Insects

Only pesky things of note were mosquitoes which were a nuisance at a couple of forested areas at either end of the day or if conditions were dull and calm. We can only imagine what some parts of the country must be like when the mozzie season is in full swing!

## Key birds

Spectacled Eider; Bristle-thighed Curlew; Kittlitz's Murrelet; Parakeet, Least and Crested Auklets; Horned Puffin; Red-legged Kittiwake; Mew Gull; Northwestern Crow; McKay's Bunting; Emperor Goose; Trumpeter and Tundra Swans; Red-faced Cormorant; Rock Sandpiper; Aleutian Tern; Northern Shrike; Northern Hawk and Boreal Owls; Pacific Wren; Smith's



Longspur; Rusty Blackbird; Sharp-tailed and Spruce Grouse; White-winged Crossbill; Black-backed Woodpecker; Red and Sooty Fox Sparrows; and American Tree Sparrow.

We were also aware of the Falcated Duck near Anchorage and Eurasian Wigeon at Nome before our trip which became key ABA targets, alongside expected and familiar-to-us-Brits targets such as: Black-throated Diver; Arctic Warbler; White Wagtail; Bluethroat; and Bohemian Waxwing.

We were also keen to see mammals such as Grizzly and Polar Bears; Orca; Wolf; Dall's Sheep and other critters.

## Resources

- [Ebird](#)
- [Xeno-canto](#)
- Maps.me (via Google Play)

- Sibley Birds 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition app (via Google Play)
- The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Western North America (Sibley, 2003)
- A birder's guide to Alaska (West, 2008) [too detailed for our needs]
- Wildlife of Europe, Asia and North America (Reeber, 2015)
- Oceanic Birds of the World: A Photo Guide (Howell and Zufelt, 2019)
- Various birders' reports (for which grateful thanks):
  - <http://www.surfbirds.com/mb/trips/alaska-merrill-0417.pdf>
  - <http://thedeskboundbirder.blogspot.com/2016/05/alaska-28th-may-day-1.html>
  - <http://www.naturalist.co.uk/reports2011/alaska11.pdf>
  - [https://www.cloudbirders.com/tripreport/repository/CHERRUG\\_Alaska\\_0607\\_2014.pdf](https://www.cloudbirders.com/tripreport/repository/CHERRUG_Alaska_0607_2014.pdf)
  - <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=viewing.main>

## Outline itinerary

We had three full days in each of Nome, Barrow and Saint Paul Island which worked perfectly, and the rest of the time doing the Anchorage-Seward-Paxson-Denali loop. We took three days to complete the Anchorage-Paxson-Denali loop, which many crews do in two days, but it enabled us to make frequent stops in good habitat seeing plenty of birds and notching up an incredible four Northern Hawk Owls, and in one early morning, a brief calling Boreal Owl.

- Sunday 26 May – Arrival into Anchorage, pick up hire car. Overnight at Best Nest on the Spruce.
- Monday 27 May – Birding around Anchorage: Far North Bicentennial Park; Potter Marsh, Lake Hood and Westchester Lagoon. Overnight at Best Nest on the Spruce.
- Tuesday 28 May – Another trip to Westchester Lagoon before flying to Saint Paul Island from Anchorage Airport. Overnight King Eider Hotel.
- Wednesday 29 May – Saint Paul Island.
- Thursday 30 May – Most of the day on Saint Paul Island; late afternoon flight back to Anchorage Airport. Pick up hire car. Overnight at Groovy Turnagain.
- Friday 31 June – Anchorage to Seward, birding along the way. At Seward visited Ava's feeders and Lovell Point. Overnight at Steller Inn.
- Saturday 1 June – Kenai Fjord boat trip from 08:00 to 17:00. Drive back to Anchorage. Overnight at Casa Del Agave.
- Sunday 2 June – Morning flight to Barrow from Anchorage, walk to hotel, pick up hire car, birding around Barrow until late pm. Next three nights at King Eider Inn.
- Monday 3 June – All day birding Barrow.

- Tuesday 4 June – All day birding Barrow.
- Wednesday 5 June – Early morning seavatch at Barrow, before flight from Barrow to Nome, changing at Anchorage. Taxi to hotel where also sort out hire car. Next three nights at Aurora Inn.
- Thursday 6 June – Most of day along the Council Road, Nome.
- Friday 7 June – To early afternoon along the Kougarok Road, Nome, then sites around Nome including the cemetery, harbour and Council Road to Safety Sound.
- Saturday 8 June – Teller Road in the morning, afternoon along the Council Road to Safety Sound. Flight back to Anchorage. Overnight at Casa Del Agave, but not before a longshot attempt at Northern Saw-whet Owl in Far North Bicentennial Park.
- Sunday 9 June – Long drive from Anchorage to Gulkana, birding along the way, including a short diversion to Hatcher's Pass, and a stop at Tolsona Campground. Overnight at Uncle Nicolai's Inn, Copper Centre.
- Monday 10 June – Gulkana Airfield and Tolsona Campground early morning, driving to Tangle River Inn birding along the way. Walk to Smith's Longspur area finding them easily. Overnight at said inn.
- Tuesday 11 June – Drive from Tangle River Inn to Denali National Park birding along the way. Next two nights at Carlo Creek Lodge.
- Wednesday 12 June – Early morning looking for grouse and critters, before a bus trip deep into Denali National Park.
- Thursday 13 June – Drive from Carlo Creek Lodge to Anchorage, via Sockeye Burn, in good time for return flights to Glasgow, via Reykjavik.

## Accommodation

We booked accommodation from websites directly: booking.com or Airbnb. We found lots of accommodation options around Anchorage, quite a few around Seward, with limited options in Nome and Barrow. There was little choice in the Gulkana / Paxson areas and much was expensive. Competition and remoteness influences pricing. It is possible to camp in some areas to reduce costs. Costs below are shown are for four persons per night.

- Best Nest on the Spruce, Anchorage (£78) via [Airbnb](#) (one bedroom and some put-up beds in the living area, with coffee and breakfast bars). Recommended, lovely host.
- [King Eider Hotel](#), Saint Paul Island – only accommodation on island and part of the 'full board' tour package, booked directly (two rooms).
- Groovy Turnagain, Anchorage (£133) via [Airbnb](#) (two rooms, with self-service breakfast)
- Steller Inn, Seward (\$144 or £111) via [booking.com](#) (one room). Nice grounds with hummingbird

feeders.

- Casa Del Agave, Anchorage (£100) via [Airbnb](#) (two rooms, with a basic, self-service breakfast)
- [King Eider Inn](#), Barrow (\$236 or £182) booked directly (one room). Within walking distance of the airport, big warm room, with microwave, all-day beverages in the lobby. Recommended.
- [Aurora Inn](#), Nome (\$254.25 or £195) booked directly (one room). A smallish room but adequate, with microwave, and all-day beverages on the lobby. Has a helpful birders' log. Recommended.
- Uncle Nicolai's Inn, Copper Centre (\$155 or £119) booked via [booking.com](#) (two rooms). Rather odd place, small rooms, not recommended for the price (though options are limited in the area). The highlight was when our only Osprey of the trip flew over!
- [Tangle River Inn, near Paxson](#) (\$270 or £208) booked directly (two rooms). The only choice in the area and expensive. Food in the restaurant was ok and not unreasonably priced.
- [Carlo Creek Lodge](#), 13 miles south of Denali (\$109 or £84) booked directly (one room). Nice wooded grounds with Varied Thrush, and Great Horned Owl do nest but earlier in the season. Highly recommended and within easy striking distance of Denali National Park.

## Food

Fast food in most places, cheap in Anchorage but more expensive elsewhere such as Nome and especially Barrow. We were so concerned about food or restaurant prices in Barrow we took our own noodles and other microwaveable food, purchased in Anchorage. As it happens the supermarket in Barrow wasn't eye-wateringly expensive on some things.

## Car hire

There's no getting away from it but hiring a car in Alaska is expensive. We hired five different cars during the trip, with a shout-out for Alamo's all round efficiency. Most companies seemed to hire cars on a 24-hour basis, not per day which was helpful to us. Total costs are shown below.

- Car 1 from Anchorage after international arrivals – part of deal with Trailfinders for £150 for two days (Alamo)
- Car 2 from Anchorage Airport after Saint Paul Island for £167 for three x 24 hours (Avis)
- Car 3 in Barrow booked directly with King Eider Inn for three x 24 hours for \$412.50 (£317.31)
- Car 4 in Nome booked directly with Aurora Inn for three x 24 hours for \$526.50 (£405.00)
- Car 5 from Anchorage Airport after Nome for six x 24 hours for £538.85 (Alamo)

In the Anchorage area fuel was about half the price of the UK, increasing to roughly the equivalent of £4.50 a gallon in the Nome area and nearer the equivalent of £6.00 a gallon in Barrow.

## Sites visited

### Anchorage area

**Far North Bicentennial Park** – We parked at Hillside Parking (61.137779,-149.752358) and walked the well-marked trails seeing Varied Thrush and other common birds easily. Though we didn't see or hear any, the area is evidently good for White-winged Crossbill.

**Potter Marsh** – Lovely wetland site with lots of birds. Is one of the most reliable sites for Rusty Blackbird. The northern carpark is at 61.078167,-149.827435 and we saw Rusty Blackbird and Falcated Duck from 61.061818,-149.808961.

**Lake Hood** – Better than expected with grebes and ducks and worth a visit if time (we accessed from 61.180598,-149.953211).

**Westchester Lagoon** – Some good birds here, notably Hudsonian Godwit. We parked at 61.206107,-149.925771 walking right to access the lagoon (only place we saw Bonaparte's Gull), and left, under the bridge to access the mudflats for waders.

### Saint Paul Island

Expensive but superb, with our experience enhanced by the excellent birding including a few ABA vagrants. The guides are keen birders themselves, helpful and knowledgeable, and go out of their way to ensure visitors see as much as possible. The accommodation is clean and food close to excellent. To book contact [St Paul Island Tour](#).

### Anchorage to Seward Highway

A lovely scenic drive. We saw Sooty Fox Sparrow and Dall's Sheep at Windy Corner (60.98476,-149.609515), American Dipper (60.985517,-149.500083), Sooty Fox Sparrow at Turnagain Pass (60.78731,-149.213602) and Townsend's Warbler at an obvious lookout on the right hand side of the road nearer to Seward.

### Seward (pronounced sue-erd)

**Ava's feeders** – Reliable for Pine Grosbeak and worth a stop when passing (60.145872,-149.411323). There's a voluntary donation box to help support the owners in paying for bird food.

**Town** – A few Northwestern Crows along Ballaine Boulevard (60.105604,-149.435578)

**Lovell Point** – Nice wooded area (Pacific Wren and Steller's Jay) with a look-out onto bay (Marbled Murrelet). The weather was deteriorating as we arrived so we didn't spend as long as we wanted (60.070603,-149.435834).

### **Kenai Fjord boat trip**

– Just superb, not to be missed. Needs a minimum of four to run and we had the boat to ourselves. Book via [Alaska Saltwater Lodging](#). We enjoyed amazing views of all the seabirds and the Orca experience will stay with us for a long time.



*We enjoyed stunning views of Orca (Killer Whale) on the Kenai Fjord boat trip*

**Steller Inn** – We recommend staying here (60.155445,-149.42312) which has humming bird feeders in the grounds.



*It's impossible to ever see too many Sabine's Gulls*

### **Barrow**

Birders visit this area mainly to see two birds, Snowy Owl and Spectacled Eider. The owl does not occur elsewhere on the main birders' circuit of Alaska, and Spectacled Eider now requires considerable luck. Birding is simply a case of looking from the limited road system that only extends a few miles beyond the town. We also made a few visits to the bird feeders where we

enjoyed great views of redpolls. We found three full birding days to be about right but birders could easily do one or two nights and clear up.

**Seawatching** – We found seawatching rewarding and enjoyable from the end of Apayauk Street, southwest of Barrow at 71.278882,-156.823474. Use the structure for shelter and respite from the cold wind.

**Barrow Point** – It's possible to get within about 2.5 miles of the point in a normal saloon car before a 4x4 is needed. It's incredible expensive for a local tour company or any of the locals to take you out to the Point. So expensive we didn't bother, preferring to scan the pack ice for bears. Locals told us that at least one polar bear was on the Point (71.386452,-156.482131) taking advantage of a whale carcass.

**Tundra** – We mainly explored the tundra within a few miles of the town. We saw our only Snowy Owl along Imaqsaun Road (71.250672,-156.776278) and Vega Gull at the tip (71.231909,-156.565636).

**Barrow town bird feeders** – Good for both species of redpoll, and Brown Lemming (71.290796,-156.795314).

## **Nome**

There are three main roads to bird, heading east west and north out of the town. These are well covered in existing gen and covered briefly below. We found three full days birding to be the perfect amount of time to explore the area and the three roads thoroughly.

**Council Road** – Goes east along the coast from Nome town before heading north, inland, through some beautiful scenery. Superb birding all the way along the road going through different habitats. We spent lots of time along the coastal section of Council Road either seawatching or checking pools and Safety Sound (64.469626,-164.753717) in the forlorn hope of jamming Emperor Goose. It's also the best area for Eastern Yellow Wagtail and we had two males, one along the coast and another just as the road heads inland (64.563526,-164.435977). The best area for Aleutian Tern is the bridge east of the town (64.486203,-165.292816). At milepost 45.9 we found Northern Wheatear. On the hill to the west of the road at milepost 53, Gyrfalcon, Surfbird and Northern Wheatear. At milepost 60.5 we were fortunate to find Arctic Warbler. You can go as far as milepost 72 through a nice patch of spruce forest with Bear River delivering a singing male Rusty Blackbird.

**Kougarak Road** – Milepost 72 (65.280874,-164.7774) is the target here, and the small pull-in with a fairly obvious path up the bank (to the left). Some gen says get here for 06:30 at the latest as the curlews vocalise and are, therefore, easy to find. Other gen says it matters not. Not ones for taking any risks, we arrived at 06:30 with our target already vocalising as we headed up the path. Veering a little to the right off the path near the top we were soon eye-balling one of the rarest waders in the world, Bristle-thighed Curlew. The campsite at milepost 39.5 back down the road is the hotspot for Bluethroat which we easily found. Further down the road still we located the known Gyrfalcon nest with two juveniles and attendant adult.

**Teller Road** – At milepost 34 there is a ridge to the north of the road (64.816876,-166.024067) which offered good birding yielding our two targets of Rock Ptarmigan, and Rock Sandpiper of the distinctive *couesi* subspecies. The ridge is apparently one of the very few sites globally where

America and Pacific Golden Plovers breed together.

**Nome town** – Surprisingly, perhaps, our only Northern Shrike was in the cemetery (64.505829,-165.420524), and only White Wagtail in the harbour (64.498875,-165.423053).

#### Paxson loop

We noticed many teams did the loop in one night, two days: from Palmer (61.599476,-149.122246), east-north-east to Gulkana (62.107981,-145.475235), from there north to Paxson (63.029206,-145.496003), and then west to Cantwell (63.390595,-148.901688) along the Denali highway in one night. We added an extra night so we could make more frequent stops birding and to look for Northern Hawk Owl. This is also the best area for Bohemian Waxwing and the more time we spent in the area the old adage goes, the luckier we hoped we'd be. And so it proved to be with four sightings of hawk owl and two of waxwing. There's plenty to see along the way, just keep alert and stop in suitable habitat. The Spruce forest which extends about 20 miles west or so west of Cantwell along the Denali Highway looks very good for grouse though you'd still need luck. We tried one very early morning coming away with an American Porcupine and car tyre puncture – the two not being linked!

**Hatcher's Pass** – A short diversion off the Palmer to Gulkana highway and is a decent site for White-tailed Ptarmigan, though we were defeated by poor weather near the top (61.791893,-149.281293). We did see our only Merlin of the trip as some consolation.

**Tolsona Campground** – A former breeding locality for Great Grey Owl with the nest now occupied by a pair of Great Horned Owl. We think the habitat has changed with no clearings that are so essential for Great Grey Owls. There is a small entrance charge (\$5.00) and we visited twice in the hope of walking into Spruce Grouse. Best birds for us were Olive-sided Flycatcher, Western Wood-Pewee and Pine Grosbeak (62.110898, -145.972705).

**Gulkana Airfield** – One of the best sites for Sharp-tailed Grouse when they are lekking, but they are shy and very hard to find in forest at any other time. Hardly anyone seems these birds here from about mid-May but we had to try. It's a good area for Alder Flycatcher and we also found our third Northern Hawk Owl (62.154514,-145.455158).

**Tangle River Inn** (63.052904,-145.978928) – A good area for Smith's Longspur and we found three birds more easily than we expected within walking distance of the Inn (63.060219,-145.958353).

#### Carla Creek Lodge (63.56402,-148.819551)

Recommended place to stay within striking distance of Denali National Park. Has Varied Thrush in the grounds and Great Horned Owl breeds earlier in the season. Has also had White-winged Crossbill.

**Denali National Park** (visitors' centre at 63.730838,-148.917198)

Visitors can access the park as far as Savage River (63.738979,-149.295517) in their own vehicles, with hop-on-hop-off park buses taking you further in, which can be booked from the visitors' centre.

### **Sockeye Burn**

Between Denali and Anchorage is a burnt area of forest which is particularly good for woodpeckers at the moment, most notably Black-backed, a tricky species in much of North America (61.843049,-150.10512).

## **Daily log – May to June 2019**

### **Sunday 26 May – Anchorage**

On-time arrival into Anchorage, efficiently through customs and car hire pickup, means we are enjoying the first of many diet cokes, and Mew Gulls, before crashing out at our first accommodation.

### **Monday 27 May - Anchorage**

Enjoyable introduction to Alaskan birding in the Far North Bicentennial Park, with easy Varied and Swainson's Thrushes. No sign of Falcated Duck or Rusty Blackbird at Potter's Marsh, though we did see our only Song Sparrow of the mainland Pacific race, and first Trumpeter Swans. Outstanding views of Common Loon at Lake Hood and prolonged views of



*We saw several spectacular Varied Thrush*

Hudsonian Godwit and Bonaparte's Gull mean we're well prepared for finding either at Teesmouth! A return visit to Potter Marsh and some alert birding by Graeme picks out the Falcated Duck, in flight with two attendant American Wigeon, the field character a local had earlier told us to look out for!

### **Tuesday 28 May – Anchorage, Saint Paul Island**

Another trip to Westchester Lagoon to grill Hudsonian Godwits before flying to Saint Paul Island from Anchorage Airport. A delayed departure from Dillingham means we arrive late into the island,

but after checking in we are quickly taken for food, picking out a nearby Song Sparrow in the gloom. With close to 24 hours light, we need not have been concerned that we would lose birding time as we are taken out in expert company with one of the seasonal guides, who at the first site finds an instructive Tundra Bean Goose, an ABA bonus tick! Great views of Red-legged Kittiwake, Tufted Duck (another ABA bonus), Wandering Tattler, Rock Sandpiper, the outsized Grey-crowned Rosy-finch and Arctic Fox set us up nicely for tomorrow.

#### Wednesday 29 May – Saint Paul Island

After a buffet breakfast, we explore the island and begin to truly appreciate just what a sanctuary for birds this is. Numerous alcids including Least, Crested and Parakeet Auklets, both puffins, lots of duck and waders, and Lapland Buntings singing from just about every tussock. A Grey-tailed Tattler, allows good comparison of wing-length to tail ratios with its Wandering relative, bringing up yet another ABA bonus bird. Before the trip we had written off any chance of McKay's Bunting such scarce migrants are they now are on the island. But, with several present, including yesterday, surely our luck was in. Flushing a 'snowball' male whilst driving with resulting poor and distant views through a windscreen wasn't the best start, but after this nervous search we find a shy and rather elusive first summer male – whew! Great views of Pacific Wren of the Pribilofs race. Only passerine migrant of the day is a Wilson's Warbler. A vagrant Slaty-backed Gull is gratefully appreciated by those on an ABA mission.

#### Thursday 30 May – Saint Paul Island

A slow start compared to the excitement of yesterday, livened up as we find a Long-toed Stint, significant for being an ABA tick, as was a Common Snipe in the afternoon. In fact it turns into an ABA day as the weather breaks and news gets out that the long-staying White-tailed Eagle is showing well. Thanks to our delayed flight we have time to drive to a highpoint and enjoy great scope views of both it and a Bald Eagle. A late arrival into Anchorage but after such an amazing experience on Saint Paul Island it matters not.

#### Friday 31 May – Anchorage to Seward

After breakfast call into Potter Marsh and this time find Rusty Blackbird and a bonus of much better views of the male Falcated Duck. Good birding to Seward with Sooty Fox Sparrow and a number of American warblers, the stunning Townsend's trumping them all. But the highlights were distinctly mammalian with a



*Moose: still reassuringly plentiful in Alaska*

close encounter with Moose and, very unexpectedly, a Grey Wolf hunting on the opposite side of Cook Inlet. A quick stop at Ava's feeders just outside Seward delivers the hoped for Pine Grosbeak for the trip list. We grill Marbled Murrelets at Lovell Point to help us pick out the much rarer bird tomorrow. In the woods just inland, Rufous Hummingbird, Pacific Wren and Steller's Jay, and double figures of Northwestern Crow in Seward.

#### Saturday 1 June – Kenai Fjords

The Kenai Fjord boat trip from 08:00 to 17:00 delivered everything with the experience exceeding our expectations, starting with the weather, warm and calm, unlike most of the preceding season, with Jim the captain telling us some birding trips have even had to be cancelled. Ouch. For the second day in a row mammals stole the show with 20+ Orcas surrounding the boat 'squeaking and farting.' Stunning views of fluking Hump-backed Whales made sure the day would be seared long in the memory. It was a nervous wait as we neared the base of the glacier having seen nothing but Marbled Murrelets, but eventually we get good views of Kittlitz's Murrelet which prove to be surprisingly distinctive. The waters clearly suit puffins as both species are in abundant numbers. Smaller numbers of Ancient Murrelet and Rhinoceros Auklet are fully appreciated. One that could have got away was the dismissal by Tom of Mike's Short-tailed Shearwater as a dark Pacific Fulmar, but fortunately we see more - a rather unexpected ABA-tick. Uneventful return journey to Anchorage.

#### Sunday 2 June – Barrow (officially Utqiagvik)

Morning flight to Barrow, walk to hotel and pick up a rather battered and dirty hire car – just as well you can't drive any distance! A seawatch from a point south of Barrow delivers the hoped for Spectacled Eider to take the pressure off, with a romp around the tundra failing to find any on the pools. Waders are ubiquitous, with phalaropes of both species and Pectoral Sandpiper seemingly on every bit of water. The gull of choice is now Glaucous with many impeccable adults, but a single Sabine's and a vagrant adult Franklin's Gull add to the variety. A male Snowy Owl picked up late into the evening proves to be the only one of the trip, despite much subsequent searching.

#### Monday 3 June - Barrow

Same routine, a seawatch with a bigger movement of Eiders than yesterday, 14 Spectacled, 150+ King and 400+ American, alongside 80+ White-billed and 40+ Pacific in just two hours! A Rough-legged Hawk is unexpected but welcomed as they can be tricky around Nome. A few Baird's Sandpiper is the only new wader added to the trip list. A good search for Polar Bear along the pack ice is unsuccessful, though we know from locals there's at least one at the point. Getting to it in a 4x4 reasonably cost-effectively, just 2.5 miles away, is another matter entirely and in the end proves impossible.

#### Tuesday 4 June - Barrow

Same drill, a seawatch and this time a full house of Eiders with 5 Steller's, alongside 21 Spectacled and treble digits of King Eider. Brandt's Black Guillemot is a potential split and good to see a few passing – even if they are indistinguishable in summer plumage! Great views of an adult Vega Gull

at the tip as a few Sabine's Gulls fly over. More time invested in finding Polar Bear on the pack ice, and Snowy Owl in and around Barrow, but it just isn't meant to be. Nor was it meant to be seeing the 'midnight sun' with cloudy and dull conditions throughout our stay.

#### Wednesday 5 June – mostly travelling, Barrow to Nome

A quick seawatch at Barrow with eiders again the highlight, and new for the trip a pair of Surf Scoter, before our flight from Barrow to Nome, changing at Anchorage. Although it's late we can't resist some Nome birding and having wolfed down a rather expensive *Subway*, we are soon watching Aleutian Terns at the bridge to the east of Nome. The perfect antidote to Barrow.

#### Thursday 6 June – Council Road, Nome

A very successful day along the Council Road, Nome, quickly picking up Red Fox and American Tree Sparrows, plus better views of exquisite Aleutian Terns. A male Eurasian Wigeon at milepost 18.5 was much more easily found than it could have been - another ABA tick. Our first non-flying Spectacled Eider at milepost 27.8 was gratefully received, but was fair reward for considerable efforts in failing to locate the single pair of Black-throated Loons which are present somewhere along the coastal section of the Council Road. Luck continued to be with us as we headed inland with a showy and spanking male Eastern Yellow Wagtail. Superb Musk Ox rounding a hill looking anything like the reintroduced beasts they are. A fortuitous stop at milepost 45.9 and the sometimes tricky Northern Wheatear was in the bag, though we did see two more at the hill at milepost 53, alongside 2 fantastic Surfbirds, plus the bonus of a flyover Gyrfalcon. Arctic Warbler would appear to be only just in but great views of a singing bird at milepost 60. The birds are just falling into place. Near the end of the road at milepost 72 the insect-like song alerted us to Blackpoll Warblers and it wasn't long before we had one in the scope, alongside a Rusty Blackbird. Back in Nome we find out that a Ross's Gull was seen briefly but after a good search along the coast we return empty-handed.

#### Friday 7 June – Kougarok and Council Roads, Nome

Another day, another road, this time the Kougarok heading deep inland after a very early start, ABA-ticking Bluethroat at milepost 39.5 along the way. Taking the path from milepost 72 it's a nervous wait but finally we are eyeballing one of the world's rarest waders, Bristle-thighed Curlew. Returning along the same road the birding wasn't as good as yesterday, but plenty of Grey-cheeked Thrushes and a nest of Gyrfalcon, replete with adult and two juveniles, keep us occupied. We are surprised not to have seen Northern Shrike so far in the trip but the unlikely environs of the cemetery close to Nome town delivers, with great views of an adult. A White Wagtail in Nome Harbour keeps the ABA list ticking along. An afternoon session along the coastal section of the Council Road with Black-throated Diver, but despite much effort no Emperor Goose. Some proper wild Canvasbacks added to the trip list.

#### Saturday 8 June – Teller and Council Roads, Nome

Today we headed west to milepost 34 along the Teller Road to find the one remaining ABA tick for two of the team, successfully locating 4 still-in-winter-plumage Rock Ptarmigan. The ridge is one of

the few areas globally where Pacific and American Golden Plovers breed and it was great to watch their different vocalisations and display flights – how were these ever lumped? We also enjoyed prolonged views of the *tschuktschorum* form of Rock Sandpiper, which looks very different to the Pribilofs' *ptilocnemis* race. The afternoon was again spent along the coastal section of the Council Road but it just wasn't the year for Emperor Goose. Back in Anchorage a daft attempt for Northern Saw-whet Owl in perpetual pre-dusk in the Far North Bicentennial Park produces nothing but mozzie bites!

#### Sunday 9 June – Anchorage to Gulkana

We had deliberately slowed this part of the itinerary down so we could look for Northern Hawk Owl, as our trip research revealed the road between Palmer and Glennallen offered our best chance. Not the best start as two of the team miss flyover White-winged Crossbills from the digs! A quick diversion to Hatcher's Pass with a Merlin atop a spruce half way up. Low cloud and drizzle militate against a trip tick of White-tailed Ptarmigan, though fortunately it wasn't a life or ABA tick for anyone - these are the ones to miss! Back along the main highway birding was predictably slow but over a few hours we track down Bohemian Waxwing, Red-tailed Hawks (both intermediate and proper Harlan's), Golden Eagle, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Hermit Thrush and Townsend's Solitaire. Finally, near milepost 134, there it was, Northern Hawk Owl, some distance in from the road, but through the scope was deliriously superb. And if that wasn't enough we find a second at milepost 180.5, this time right by the road. The once famous Tolsona Campground Great Grey Owls are no more and once we explore the area we think we can explain why - no clearings. About four seasons ago was the last time Great Greys nested, with the nest subsequently taken over by Great Horned Owls, but the young of which had already fledged. A desperate check of Gulkana Airfield for Sharp-tailed Grouse reveals nothing before finding our accommodation and a local restaurant.



*A male Bufflehead with iridescent colours when seen well*

#### Monday 10 June – Gulkana to Tangle River Inn

Up early to look for Grouse, both Sharp-tailed and Spruce, along roads, Gulkana Airfield and Tolsona Campground, but in the breeding season they are mightily hard. Whilst our luck wasn't in with grouse, it certainly was elsewhere as we notch up two more Northern Hawk Owls, one at the airfield and one by the road between Gulkana and Tolsona Campground. A daytime

calling Boreal Owl between Gulkana and Paxson is a real surprise even though we fail to track it down. Venturing out after a torrential rain induced powernap at Tangle River Inn, we were soon enjoying superb views of three Smith's Longspurs in flat areas with plenty of cotton grass bordered

by low bushes. With the pressure off look for Grizzly Bears finding only Moose and Beaver.

#### Tuesday 11 June – Tangle River Inn to Denali

The road from Tangle River Inn to Cantwell junction isn't as birdy as we had hoped, and one that got away is a possible Ruffed Grouse which flew low across the road but too quickly and too far off to be certain. With the road deteriorating we also end up with a puncture, which a garage at Healy quickly and efficiently sorts out. Nothing especially to highlight in the accessible-to-private-vehicles part of Denali National Park and we retire early to our accommodation.

#### Wednesday 12 June – Denali National Park

Early morning looking for grouse with predictable results, but brilliant views of American Porcupine providing some compensation. Two of the team take the 11-hour return bus deep into Denali National Park, and the other two sort out a second puncture before venturing into the park on a later bus. The park delivers the expected mammal fest with Caribou, Dall's Sheep, Moose, Hoary Marmot, Red Fox and best of all 'blonde' Grizzly Bears.

#### Thursday 13 June – Denali to Anchorage, Sockeye Burn

Four hour drive from Carlo Creek Lodge to Anchorage, extended by virtue of visiting a burnt area of forest around Sockeye Burn, which proves productive for woodpeckers, notably Black-backed and American Three-toed. Unexpectedly, two groups of White-winged Crossbills fly over providing two of the crew who missed this earlier, with a future armchair tick as surely an upgrade is likely. The return journey to the UK is anything but swift (due to a longer than anticipated stop in Reykjavik) but was at least uneventful.

### **Acknowledgements**

Thanks to those birders taking the time and trouble to produce such good accounts of their trips for others to follow, with the Ian Merrill report setting the standard in recent years. Thanks to Graeme and Tom for company and great birding, and to Graeme for a thorough proof read of this report, and for researching the Canada Goose complex, prior to publication.

### **The team:**

Tom Francis – photo of Orca (Killer Whale)

Denise Hunter

Mike Hunter – this report (for further information please contact [mikee\\_deedee@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:mikee_deedee@yahoo.co.uk))

Graeme Joynt – all other photos in report

## Systematic list of birds seen

For simplicity, the site 'Paxson loop' refers to the road heading east-north-east from Palmer to Gulkana, north to Paxson and west along the Denali Highway to Cantwell. Particular sites along the route are named and key birds given more accurate locations where appropriate.

Brant Goose ( <i>Branta bernicla</i> )	Noted only at Barrow and Safety Sound, Council Road, Nome
Lesser Canada Goose ( <i>Branta Canadensi</i> )	Most of the geese we saw were <i>parvipes</i> , commonly around Anchorage (Potter Marsh, Lake Hood and Westchester Lagoon), Nome and at Gulkana Airfield
Cackling Canada Goose ( <i>Branta hutchinsii</i> )	A single with <i>parvipes</i> stood out at Gulkana Airfield on size alone, as did the <i>taverni</i> at Potter Marsh (2) and Barrow (1)
Snow Goose ( <i>Anser caerulescens</i> )	Saint Paul Island (2) Barrow (20) and Council Road, Nome (12)
Tundra Bean Goose ( <i>Anser serrirostris</i> )	A single, vagrant, Saint Paul Island
Greater White-fronted Goose ( <i>Anser albifrons</i> )	Common at Barrow and a single Saint Paul Island
Trumpeter Swan ( <i>Cygnus buccinators</i> )	Widely scattered along the Paxson loop and a single at Gulkana Airfield. Anchorage area had birds on Potter Marsh & Westchester Lagoon, and road to Seward
Tundra Swan ( <i>Cygnus columbianus</i> )	250+ in Safety Sound, Council Road, Nome and 8 at Barrow
Northern Shoveler ( <i>Spatula clypeata</i> )	Widely scattered and seen in most locations except Nome
Gadwall ( <i>Mareca strepera</i> )	Only noted in Anchorage area (Potter Marsh & Lake Hood)
Falcated Duck ( <i>Mareca falcate</i> )	A cracking male, a vagrant, at Potter Marsh, Anchorage
Eurasian Wigeon ( <i>Mareca Penelope</i> )	A single, vagrant male Council Road (milepost 18.5), Nome
American Wigeon ( <i>Mareca Americana</i> )	Widespread
Mallard ( <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i> )	Anchorage (Lake Hood), Barrow, the Paxson loop and between Denali and Anchorage
Northern Pintail ( <i>Anas acuta</i> )	Widespread
Eurasian Teal ( <i>Anas crecca</i> )	A few clear <i>crecca</i> on Saint Paul Island, but there were also a number of hybrids with intermediate features
Green-winged Teal ( <i>Anas carolinensis</i> )	Widespread
Canvasback ( <i>Aythya valisineria</i> )	11 in Safety Sound, Council Road, Nome
Ring-necked Duck ( <i>Aythya collaris</i> )	Noted at Potter Marsh, Anchorage, Saint Paul Island, and Denali National Park
Tufted Duck ( <i>Aythya fuligula</i> )	Vagrants (3 m & 1 f) on Saint Paul Island
Greater Scaup ( <i>Aythya marila</i> )	Most widespread scaup, seen in most areas visited, commoner in coastal areas
Lesser Scaup ( <i>Aythya affinis</i> )	Noted only along Paxson loop and on Lake Hood, Anchorage
Steller's Eider ( <i>Polysticta stelleri</i> )	42 at Barrow - 5 from seawatch one morning and 37 on pools
Spectacled Eider ( <i>Somateria fischeri</i> )	54 in seawatches totalling nine hours over four days. A fine, single male along Council Road (milepost 27.8), Nome
King Eider ( <i>Somateria spectabilis</i> )	780 counted at Barrow over four days, the vast majority from seawatches but a few also on pools. 4 on Saint Paul Island
American Eider ( <i>Somateria mollissima</i> )	2,700 logged at Barrow on seawatches over four days. Frequent along Council Road, Nome

Harlequin Duck ( <i>Histrionicus histrionicus</i> )	Saint Paul Island (25) and Council Road, Nome (4)
Surf Scoter ( <i>Melanitta perspicillata</i> )	10 in two lakes along Paxson loop, 6 off the Council Road, Nome and a pair during a Barrow seawatch
White-winged Scoter ( <i>Melanitta deglandi</i> )	Council Road, Nome (15+) and a stunning pair on Paxson loop
Black Scoter ( <i>Melanitta Americana</i> )	Saint Paul Island (1) , Barrow seawatching (7), Council Road, Nome (12)
Long-tailed Duck ( <i>Clangula hyemalis</i> )	3,000+ counted at Barrow on seawatches over four days. Also, Saint Paul Island, Council Road, Nome and Paxson loop
Bufflehead ( <i>Bucephala albeola</i> )	Saint Paul Island (f), Paxson loop (pair), Denali National Park (2 m)
Common Goldeneye ( <i>Bucephala clangula</i> )	Scarcer than Barrow's, only noted Lake Hood, Anchorage (2 m), and Paxson loop (1 m)
Barrow's Goldeneye ( <i>Bucephala islandica</i> )	Lake Hood, Anchorage, Road between Anchorage and Seward, Paxson loop, and Denali National Park
Common Merganser ( <i>Mergus merganser</i> )	Only noted on lake near Seward
Red-breasted Merganser ( <i>Mergus serrator</i> )	Widespread but in small numbers, Saint Paul Island, Kenai Fjord boat trip, Council and Kougarok Roads, Nome, Paxson loop
Rock Ptarmigan ( <i>Lagopus muta</i> )	Teller Road (milepost 34), Nome
Willow Grouse [Ptarmigan] ( <i>Lagopus lagopus</i> )	Kougarok and Teller Roads, Nome and Denali National Park
Red-throated Loon ( <i>Gavia stellata</i> )	Lake Hood, Anchorage (1) Council Road, Nome (20+), Kougarok Road, Nome (2) Paxson loop (2)
Black-throated Loon ( <i>Gavia arctica</i> )	A single along Council Road, Nome
Pacific Loon ( <i>Gavia pacifica</i> )	Hundreds logged during seawatches totalling nine hours over four mornings at Barrow, and 20+ along Council Road, Nome
Common Loon ( <i>Gavia immer</i> )	Stunning when seen close. Lake Hood, Anchorage, Council Road, Nome, and Paxson loop
Yellow-billed Loon ( <i>Gavia adamsii</i> )	239 logged during seawatches totalling nine hours over four mornings at Barrow, a few on the sea, but most flying east. The light at Barrow made even the most distant bills appear obvious. An additional single also flew east at Nome.
Pacific (Northern) Fulmar ( <i>Fulmarus glacialis rodgersii</i> )	A few around Saint Paul Island and Barrow of the potentially splittable Pacific form <i>rodgersii</i> – indeed currently with IOC as a proposed split and treated as such in Howell and Zufelt
Short-tailed Shearwater ( <i>Ardenna tenuirostris</i> )	Something of a surprise was 5 during Kenai Fjord boat trip
Red-necked Grebe ( <i>Podiceps grisegena</i> )	Anchorage is something of a stronghold (Potter Marsh, Lake Hood, Westchester Lagoon), also seen at Barrow
Horned Grebe ( <i>Podiceps auritus</i> )	A single between Anchorage and Seward
Pelagic Cormorant ( <i>Phalacrocorax pelagicus</i> )	A few Saint Paul Island, Kenai Fjord boat trip, Council Road, Nome
Red-faced Cormorant ( <i>Phalacrocorax urile</i> )	10+ on Saint Paul Island
Double-crested Cormorant ( <i>Phalacrocorax auritus</i> )	A few from Kenai Fjord boat trip

Western Osprey ( <i>Pandion haliaetus</i> )	A single over Copper Centre
Golden Eagle ( <i>Aquila chrysaetos</i> )	Singles from Anchorage to Seward road, Council Road, Nome, and 2 along Paxson loop
Northern Harrier ( <i>Circus hudsonius</i> )	Scarce, stunning when encountered, singles Potter Marsh, Anchorage and Gulkana Airfield, and 2 along Paxson loop
White-tailed Eagle ( <i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i> )	An immature Saint Paul Island
Bald Eagle ( <i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i> )	Reassuringly widespread and regularly encountered, seen at most sites except Barrow
Red-tailed (Harlan's) Hawk ( <i>Buteo jamaicensis alascensis</i> )	Paxson loop with an intermediate and 4 Harlan's, a single Harlan's at Gulkana Airfield, and an undetermined form between Denali and Anchorage. With IOC to consider the proposed split of Harlan's ( <i>alascensis</i> )
Rough-legged Hawk ( <i>Buteo lagopus</i> )	2 at Barrow and 3 Council Road, Nome
Sandhill Crane ( <i>Antigone canadensis</i> )	Potter Marsh, Lake Hood Council Road, Nome, Carlo Creek Lodge to Anchorage 2,
Black Oystercatcher ( <i>Haematopus bachmani</i> )	Kenai Fjord boat trip 2
Pacific Golden Plover ( <i>Pluvialis fulva</i> )	Saint Paul Island 4, Nome Cemetery, and comparison views with American at Teller Road (milepost 34), Nome
American Golden Plover ( <i>Pluvialis dominica</i> )	A few at Barrow, and from all three roads radiating from Nome
Grey Plover ( <i>Pluvialis squatarola</i> )	A single at Barrow
Semipalmated Plover ( <i>Charadrius semipalmatus</i> )	Noted Saint Paul Island, Barrow, Council Road and Kougarok Roads, Nome
Bristle-thighed Curlew ( <i>Numenius tahitiensis</i> )	Kougarok Road (milepost 72), Nome
Whimbrel ( <i>Numenius phaeopus rufiventris</i> )	Kougarok Road, Nome, and Tangle River Inn
Bar-tailed Godwit ( <i>Limosa lapponica</i> )	2 Saint Paul Island, a few Council Road, Nome, and a single Teller Road, Nome
Hudsonian Godwit ( <i>Limosa haemastica</i> )	3 in the mudflats near Westchester Lagoon
Ruddy Turnstone ( <i>Arenaria interpres</i> )	A single Saint Paul Island and a few at Barrow
Black Turnstone ( <i>Arenaria melanocephala</i> )	3 Council Road, Nome
Red Knot ( <i>Calidris canutus</i> )	A single Teller Road (milepost 34), Nome
Surfbird ( <i>Calidris virgate</i> )	Council Road (milepost 53), Nome,
Long-toed Stint ( <i>Calidris subminuta</i> )	A single Saint Paul Island
Red-necked Stint ( <i>Calidris ruficollis</i> )	Singles Saint Paul Island and Barrow
Sanderling ( <i>Calidris alba</i> )	5 at Barrow
Dunlin ( <i>Calidris alpine</i> )	A single at Saint Paul Island and 10+ Barrow
Rock Sandpiper ( <i>Calidris ptilocnemis</i> )	The nominate form common on Saint Paul Island, and 5+ Teller Road (milepost 34), Nome of the distinctive <i>couesi</i> subspecies
Baird's Sandpiper ( <i>Calidris bairdii</i> )	At least 4 at Barrow
Least Sandpiper ( <i>Calidris minutilla</i> )	2 Saint Paul Island
White-rumped Sandpiper ( <i>Calidris fuscicollis</i> )	11+ Barrow
Pectoral Sandpiper ( <i>Calidris melanotos</i> )	175+ Barrow
Semipalmated Sandpiper ( <i>Calidris pusilla</i> )	40+ Barrow (40+), a few Saint Paul Island, Anchorage (Westchester Lagoon), Council and Teller Roads, Nome
Western Sandpiper ( <i>Calidris mauri</i> )	Singles Saint Paul Island and Council Road, Nome, 5 at Barrow
Long-billed Dowitcher ( <i>Limnodromus</i> )	A single Saint Paul Island and 8 Barrow

scolopaceus)	
Short-billed Dowitcher ( <i>Limnodromus griseus</i> )	6+ Potter Marsh, Anchorage
Common Snipe ( <i>Gallinago gallinago</i> )	A single, vagrant, Saint Paul Island
Wilson's Snipe ( <i>Gallinago delicata</i> )	Only noted at Nome, on all three roads radiating out
Red-necked Phalarope ( <i>Phalaropus lobatus</i> )	At least 75 at Barrow, Lake Hood, Kotzebue Airport, Kougarok Road, Nome Tangle River Inn, Tangle River Inn to Cantwell,
Red Phalarope ( <i>Phalaropus fulicarius</i> )	200+ at Barrow, and a few at Saint Paul Island, Council Road, Nome
Common Sandpiper ( <i>Actitis hypoleucos</i> )	A single, vagrant, Council Road, Nome
Spotted Sandpiper ( <i>Actitis macularius</i> )	Saint Paul Island – the second record for the Pribilofs! Another single at Barrow
Wandering Tattler ( <i>Tringa incana</i> )	2 Saint Paul Island for great comparison with Grey-tailed
Grey-tailed Tattler ( <i>Tringa brevipes</i> )	A single Saint Paul Island
Lesser Yellowlegs ( <i>Tringa flavipes</i> )	Potter Marsh, Westchester Lagoon Palmer to Gulkana road, Tangle River Inn,
Greater Yellowlegs ( <i>Tringa melanoleuca</i> )	A single Saint Paul Island
Black-legged Kittiwake ( <i>Rissa tridactyla</i> )	Common Saint Paul Island and a few Kenai Fjord boat trip and Barrow
Red-legged Kittiwake ( <i>Rissa brevirostris</i> )	Better than expected, and fairly common Saint Paul Island
Sabine's Gull ( <i>Xema sabini</i> )	15 beautiful adults during three days at Barrow
Bonaparte's Gull ( <i>Chroicocephalus philadelphia</i> )	A few spankers at Westchester Lagoon, Anchorage
Franklin's Gull ( <i>Leucophaeus pipixcan</i> )	A vagrant adult Barrow
Mew Gull ( <i>Larus canus</i> )	Particularly common around Anchorage (Potter Marsh, Lake Hood, Westchester Lagoon). Noted also along Council and Kougarok Roads, Nome and Denali National Park
Glaucous-winged Gull ( <i>Larus glaucescens</i> )	The gull of choice around Seward, common at Lovell Point and from Kenai Fjord boat trip. An immature along Council Road, Nome, and a few Saint Paul Island. Some looked pure around Anchorage but see American Herring Gull below
Glaucous Gull ( <i>Larus hyperboreus</i> )	A few Saint Paul Island, common at Barrow and 40+ along, Council and Kougarok Roads, Nome
American Herring Gull ( <i>Larus smithsonianus</i> )	3 birds along Council Road, Nome were the only ones we were confident about. A few around Anchorage (Potter Marsh and Westchester Lagoon) looked good candidates for pure birds but such is the extent of hybridisation with <i>glaucescens</i> that 'Cook Inlet' is now the dominant form
Vega Gull ( <i>Larus vegae</i> )	An adult at Barrow's refuse tip
Slaty-backed Gull ( <i>Larus schistisagus</i> )	A vagrant adult graced Saint Paul Island
Aleutian Tern ( <i>Onychoprion aleuticus</i> )	Council Road, Nome where common
Arctic Tern ( <i>Sterna paradisaea</i> )	Widespread, mostly around the coast but a few inland
Pomarine Jaeger ( <i>Stercorarius pomarinus</i> )	2 at Barrow
Parasitic Jaeger ( <i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i> )	Saint Paul Island and Council Road, Nome
Long-tailed Jaeger ( <i>Stercorarius longicaudus</i> )	Fairly common around Nome, particularly Council Road, and 2

	at Barrow
Thick-billed Murre ( <i>Uria lomvia</i> )	A few Saint Paul Island, Kenai Fjord boat trip and seawatching off Barrow
Common Murre ( <i>Uria aalge</i> )	Saint Paul Island, Kenai Fjord boat trip & Council Road, Nome,
Black (Mandt's) Guillemot ( <i>Cepphus grille mandtii</i> )	4 seawatching off Barrow, presumably of the subspecies <i>mandtii</i> , sometimes regarded as a good species
Pigeon Guillemot ( <i>Cepphus Columba</i> )	A single Saint Paul Island, a few off Lovell Point and Kenai Fjord boat trip
Marbled Murrelet ( <i>Brachyramphus marmoratus</i> )	Lovell Point (4), and Kenai Fjord boat trip (15+)
Kittlitz's Murrelet ( <i>Brachyramphus brevirostris</i> )	4 Kenai Fjord boat trip (4)
Ancient Murrelet ( <i>Synthliboramphus antiquus</i> )	25+ Kenai Fjord boat trip
Parakeet Auklet ( <i>Aethia psittacula</i> )	50+ Saint Paul Island
Least Auklet ( <i>Aethia pusilla</i> )	100+ Saint Paul Island,
Crested Auklet ( <i>Aethia cristatella</i> )	30+ Saint Paul Island, Barrow
Rhinoceros Auklet ( <i>Cerorhinca monocerata</i> )	15+ Kenai Fjord boat trip
Horned Puffin ( <i>Fratercula corniculata</i> )	Common Saint Paul Island and Kenai Fjord boat trip
Tufted Puffin ( <i>Fratercula cirrhata</i> )	Common Saint Paul Island and Kenai Fjord boat trip
Rock Dove ( <i>Columba livia</i> )	Only noted at Anchorage
Snowy Owl ( <i>Bubo scandiacus</i> )	A single male at Barrow
Northern Hawk Owl ( <i>Surnia ulula</i> )	An incredible 4 different birds in 17 hours along Paxson loop. 3 singles heading east towards Gulkana (mileposts 134, 180.5 and close to junction), and another single at Gulkana Airfield
Boreal Owl ( <i>Aegolius funereus</i> )	1 heard early morning between Gulkana and Paxson.
Short-eared Owl ( <i>Asio flammeus</i> )	Singles Saint Paul Island & Kougark Road (milepost 72) Nome
Rufous Hummingbird ( <i>Selasphorus rufus</i> )	Singles at Steller Inn, Seward, and Lovell Point
Belted Kingfisher ( <i>Megasceryle alcyon</i> )	A single from Anchorage to Seward road, and another heard at Westchester Lagoon
American Three-toed Woodpecker ( <i>Picoides dorsalis</i> )	A single at Sockeye Burn
Black-backed Woodpecker ( <i>Picoides arcticus</i> )	2 at Sockeye Burn
Downy Woodpecker ( <i>Dryobates pubescens</i> )	All singles, Anchorage (Westchester Lagoon and Potter Marsh), Paxson loop, Seward (Ava's feeders), Paxson loop
Hairy Woodpecker ( <i>Leuconotopicus villosus</i> )	2 at Seward (Ava's feeders) and a single Sockeye Burn
Northern Flicker ( <i>Colaptes auratus</i> )	2 along Paxson loop
Merlin ( <i>Falco columbarius</i> )	A single at Hatcher's Pass
Gyr Falcon ( <i>Falco rusticolus</i> )	Council Road, Nome (milepost 53) Kougark Road, Nome (nest with attendant adult and 2 juvs)
Olive-sided Flycatcher ( <i>Contopus cooperi</i> )	Singles along Paxson loop and Tolsona Campground, and another heard at Sockeye Burn
Western Wood Pewee ( <i>Contopus sordidulus</i> )	Singles at Tolsona Campground and Sockeye Burn
Alder Flycatcher ( <i>Empidonax alnorum</i> )	3 at Gulkana Airfield and a single at Sockeye Burn
Northern Shrike ( <i>Lanius borealis</i> )	A single at Nome Cemetery

Grey (Canada) Jay ( <i>Perisoreus canadensis</i> )	A few in the southern third of Alaska, Anchorage (Far North Bicentennial Park); Paxson loop, Gulkana Airfield, Healy and Denali National Park
Steller's Jay ( <i>Cyanocitta stelleri</i> )	A single at Lovell Point
Black-billed Magpie ( <i>Pica hudsonia</i> )	Widespread, as far north as Nome
Northwestern Crow ( <i>Corvus caurinus</i> )	Lovell Point (7) and Kenai Fjord boat trip (1)
Northern Raven ( <i>Corvus corax</i> )	Widespread but never common and seen at most sites visited
Bohemian Waxwing ( <i>Bombycilla garrulous</i> )	Paxson loop (1 and 3 birds), and 1 in Denali National Park
Black-capped Chickadee ( <i>Poecile atricapillus</i> )	Only seen in Anchorage area (Far North Bicentennial Park and Potter Marsh)
Boreal Chickadee ( <i>Poecile hudsonicus</i> )	A single in Anchorage's Far North Bicentennial Park
Horned Lark ( <i>Eremophila alpestris</i> )	Nome, with 3 Council Road, and 2 Teller Road (milepost 34)
Sand Martin ( <i>Riparia riparia</i> )	Saint Paul Island, and on all three roads out of Nome
Tree Swallow ( <i>Tachycineta bicolor</i> )	Best numbers for us were around Anchorage (Far North Bicentennial Park, Potter Marsh, Lake Hood) with a few around Nome and along Council Road
Violet-green Swallow ( <i>Tachycineta thalassina</i> )	Much scarcer than Tree, (6+ at Far North Bicentennial Park and a single at Potter Marsh); a few between Anchorage & Seward
American Cliff Swallow ( <i>Petrochelidon pyrrhonota</i> )	Best numbers along the Paxson loop, with many nests at Tangle River Inn and Gulkana Airfield. A few from roads out of Nome, always around river bridges where they breed
Arctic Warbler ( <i>Phylloscopus borealis</i> )	It seems we were fortunate to find this late arriving migrant, with just a single along Council Road, Nome
Golden-crowned Kinglet ( <i>Regulus satrapa</i> )	A single seen in Anchorage (Far North Bicentennial Park)
Ruby-crowned Kinglet ( <i>Regulus calendula</i> )	Singles seen at Lovell Point and Council Road, Nome. Others heard at Steller Inn, Seward and Tolsona Campground
Pacific Wren ( <i>Troglodytes pacificus</i> )	A single at Lovell Point and 2 Saint Paul Island of the larger subspecies <i>alascensis</i> . We also heard birds at Steller Inn, Seward, and from the Kenai Fjord boat trip
Red-breasted Nuthatch <i>Sitta canadensis</i>	Singles at Anchorage (Far North Bicentennial Park) and Anchorage (Westchester Lagoon)
Common Starling ( <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i> )	Noted around Anchorage
Varied Thrush ( <i>Ixoreus naevius</i> )	3 spankers in Anchorage's Far North Bicentennial Park, a single Carlo Creek Lodge, and an unexpected migrant at Barrow. Heard at Steller Inn, Seward and Denali National Park
Townsend's Solitaire ( <i>Myadestes townsendi</i> )	2 Paxson loop
Grey-cheeked Thrush ( <i>Catharus minimus</i> )	Fairly common on all three roads radiating out of Nome (one road we had 7 birds in view together. A single Tangle River Inn
Swainson's Thrush ( <i>Catharus ustulatus</i> )	3 in Anchorage's Far North Bicentennial Park and a single at Tolsona Campground
Hermit Thrush ( <i>Catharus guttatus</i> )	2 Paxson loop
American Robin <i>Turdus migratorius</i>	Widespread except for Barrow
Bluethroat ( <i>Luscinia svecica</i> )	Kougarok Road (3 at milepost 39.5), Nome
Northern Wheatear ( <i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i> )	3 Council Road (mileposts 45.9 and 53), Nome, and 2 Teller Road (milepost 34), Nome

American Dipper ( <i>Cinclus mexicanus</i> )	2 from Anchorage to Seward road, a single Teller Road, Nome
Eastern Yellow Wagtail ( <i>Motacilla tschutschensis</i> )	Declining in Alaska and we thought we might struggle, but in the end 2 straightforward males Council Road, Nome
White Wagtail ( <i>Motacilla alba</i> )	Often tricky but not this year, an easy single Nome harbour
Buff-bellied Pipit ( <i>Anthus rubescens</i> )	3 Council Road, Nome
Pine Grosbeak ( <i>Pinicola enucleator</i> )	A single singing male at Seward (Ava's feeders), and a confiding pair feeding low down at Tolsona Campground
Grey-crowned Rosy Finch ( <i>Leucosticte tephrocotis</i> )	This out-sized finch was common on Saint Paul Island
Common Redpoll ( <i>Acanthis flammea</i> )	Frustrating flyovers around Anchorage before better views at both Nome and Barrow
Arctic Redpoll ( <i>Acanthis hornemanni</i> )	A few at Barrow, mostly at the bird feeders, and a few Council Road, Nome and in Nome town
White-winged Crossbill ( <i>Loxia leucoptera</i> )	Ca. 10 over Anchorage accommodation early morning, 22 over Sockeye Burn in two flocks. Heard at Denali National Park
Pine Siskin ( <i>Spinus pinus</i> )	2 Anchorage (Far North Bicentennial Park) and 4 Seward (Ava's feeders)
Lapland Longspur ( <i>Calcarius lapponicus</i> )	Common Saint Paul Island, and frequent at Barrow and Nome
Smith's Longspur ( <i>Calcarius pictus</i> )	3 males Tangle River Inn
Snow Bunting ( <i>Plectrophenax nivalis</i> )	Saint Paul Island, Barrow, Teller Road (milepost 34), Nome
McKay's Bunting ( <i>Plectrophenax hyperboreus</i> )	What a year to pick on Saint Paul island, having its best season for this species for years. We were fortunate to see adult and second calendar year males
Red Fox Sparrow ( <i>Passerella iliaca</i> )	Paxson loop and Nome are clearly the hotspots for this species with easily double-figures in each area. An additional single between Denali and Anchorage
Sooty Fox Sparrow ( <i>Passerella unalaschensis</i> )	A few between Anchorage and Seward
(Pacific) Song Sparrow ( <i>Melospiza melodia</i> )	A single of the pacific subspecies <i>kenaiensis</i> at Potter Marsh (boardwalk), and a single of the dark and massive <i>sanaka</i> subspecies Saint Paul Island, proving that decreasing surface area to volume ratio is a critical survival factor
Lincoln's Sparrow ( <i>Melospiza lincolnii</i> )	Singles Anchorage (Potter Marsh), and between Anchorage and Seward
White-crowned Sparrow ( <i>Zonotrichia leucophrys</i> )	Widespread but thinly distributed
Golden-crowned Sparrow ( <i>Zonotrichia atricapilla</i> )	A few noted between Anchorage and Seward, and along the Council and Teller Roads, Nome
Dark-eyed Junco ( <i>Junco hyemalis</i> )	Widespread as far north as Nome
Savannah Sparrow ( <i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i> )	Close to abundant along the coastal section of Council Road, Nome, and seen at most other sites visited including Barrow
American Tree Sparrow ( <i>Spizelloides arborea</i> )	A few on each of the three roads radiating out of Nome, and easy to find at Tangle River Inn (at least 4)
Rusty Blackbird ( <i>Euphagus carolinus</i> )	Scarce and declining. We saw 6 birds in total: Anchorage (Potter Marsh), 3 Council Road (singing male Bear River and 2

	milepost 32), Nome, 2 Paxson loop (marsh west of Gulkana)
Northern Waterthrush ( <i>Parkesia noveboracensis</i> )	Widely scattered except for Barrow
Orange-crowned Warbler ( <i>Leiothlypis celata</i> )	3+ Anchorage (Far North Bicentennial Park and Potter Marsh), between Anchorage and Seward, from all three roads out of Nome, and a few along Paxson loop
American Yellow Warbler ( <i>Setophaga aestival</i> )	Council Road, Nome, Kougark Road, Nome Tangle River Inn 3, Tangle River Inn to Cantwell 1,
Blackpoll Warbler ( <i>Setophaga striata</i> )	A few along Council and Kougark Roads, Nome and 4+ Paxson loop
Myrtle Warbler ( <i>Setophaga coronate</i> )	A few Anchorage (Far North Bicentennial Park, Potter Marsh, Westchester Lagoon), between Anchorage and Seward, Gulkana Airfield, and Paxson loop
Townsend's Warbler ( <i>Setophaga townsendi</i> )	A single male, stunner, between Anchorage and Seward, and another heard at Seward (Steller Inn)
Wilson's Warbler ( <i>Cardellina pusilla</i> )	A single male in Anchorage's Far North Bicentennial Park, Saint Paul Island (migrant male) Anchorage to Seward, Council Road, Nome (3), Tangle River Inn (2)

## List of mammals seen

Snowshoe Hare ( <i>Lepus americanus</i> )	Widely scattered, Paxson loop, Tolsona Campground, Nome (Council and Kougark Road), Denali National Park, between Denali and Anchorage
Rabbit / Cottontail sp ( <i>Sylvilagus</i> sp.)	Singles Denali National Park and Paxson loop
Hoary Marmot ( <i>Marmota caligata</i> )	Singles Denali National Park and Kougark Road, Nome
Arctic Ground Squirrel [Souslik] ( <i>Spermophilus parryi</i> )	Quite common around Nome and seen on all roads radiating out, a few Paxson loop and Denali National Park
American Red Squirrel ( <i>Tamiasciurus hudsonicus</i> )	Paxson loop, Tolsona Campground, between Anchorage and Seward and in Seward, and between Denali and Anchorage
American Beaver ( <i>Castor Canadensis</i> )	2 along Kougark Road, Nome and a single Paxson loop
Muskrat ( <i>Ondatra zibethicus</i> )	2 on Lake Hood and a single Council Road, Nome
Brown Lemming ( <i>Lemmus trimucronatus</i> )	A single Barrow (bird feeders)
North American Porcupine ( <i>Erethizon dorsatum</i> )	Distant views of a single at Gulkana Airfield but a stunning close single Paxson loop
Arctic Fox ( <i>Vulpes lagopus</i> )	Saint Paul Island, where we saw double-figures. It's possible this was introduced to the island but no one really knows
Red Fox ( <i>Vulpes vulpes</i> )	A few daytime sightings on Council and Teller Roads, Nome, and 2 in Denali National Park
Grey Wolf ( <i>Canis lupus</i> )	An extremely fortuitous sighting of one on opposite side of the Cook Inlet, south of Anchorage
Brown (Grizzly) Bear ( <i>Ursus arctos</i> )	5 in Denali National Park and a trip highlight for Denise
Northern Fur Seal ( <i>Callorhinus ursinus</i> )	Saint Paul Island
Northern (Steller's) Sea-Lion ( <i>Eumetopias jubatus</i> )	Saint Paul Island and Kenai Fjord boat trip
Harbour (Common) Seal ( <i>Phoca vitulina</i> )	Saint Paul Island, Kenai Fjord boat trip, Council Road, Nome
Spotted (Largha) Seal ( <i>Phoca largha</i> )	A single hauled out on pack ice at Barrow
Sea Otter ( <i>Enhydra lutris</i> )	Double figures from Kenai Fjord boat trip, and a few between Seward and Lovell Point
Humpback Whale ( <i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i> )	Great views of 10+ Kenai Fjord boat trip and a single whilst seawatching at Barrow
Harbour Porpoise ( <i>Phocoena phocoena</i> )	A single between Seward and Lovell Point
Dall's Porpoise ( <i>Phocoenoides dalli</i> )	5 'mini-Orcas' bow riding on Kenai Fjord boat trip
Killer Whale [Orca] ( <i>Orcinus orca</i> )	A trip highlight for all, 20+ Kenai Fjord boat trip
Moose [Elk] ( <i>Alces alces</i> )	We saw 14 at widely scattered locations but mostly along the Paxson loop or in Denali National Park. A few others noted at Council Road, Nome and between Anchorage and Seward
Caribou [Reindeer] ( <i>Rangifer tarandus</i> )	29 counted in Denali National Park
Dall Sheep ( <i>Ovis dalli</i> )	A single from Windy Corner, south of Anchorage, and 9 Denali National Park
Mountain Goat ( <i>Oreamnos americanus</i> )	2 Kenai Fjord boat trip
Musk Ox ( <i>Ovibos moschatus</i> )	Reintroduced into the Nome area and evidently doing well in and around - and from all roads - radiating out of the town